1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

surmounted with drapery of many colours, stands in the middle of the floor of the storey above. The four prayer-wheels practically touch each other; there is about a yard of free ground between the wheels and the side walls, and a larger space between the doorway and the first wheel. The *lha-gong* is primarily the place of worship of the nuns—*in-é-bu*—and they are meant to be responsible for the services and good order of this place. The big wheels are turned by people sitting down, and there are wooden handles attached to the base which make this operation easier. Each time one of the big wheels completes a revolution a small bell is rung. The wheels are covered with paper of a vaguely Chinese design, representing fantastic flowers and goddesses.

The first storey is approached by an external wooden staircase on the east side. It leads first of all into a corridor with an unused cooking place; at the back of that is a small and completely dark chamber called *tyang-gong* which is employed for mystic fasting and contemplation and also for the weekly ceremony of *kong-so klon* which is performed, at considerable risks, it is believed, to the officiant, to cleanse the monastery and neighbourhood of those devils which are infesting it.

The main first-storey room is very similar to the one below, except that the books and images on the altar are different. This first-floor altar is flanked by a pair of thunder-birds—*sa-dher*—resembling Chinese dragons in silhouette cut out of cardboard. A couple of books are also kept permanently on the altar. To the right of the altar is a cupboard containing the sacred book Rin-chet; this book is treated with great reverence and the cupboard which holds it receives bowls of water and *chimi* as though it were an altar. But none of the lamas of Lingthem can read this book, nor do they know the proper ceremonials which should accompany the reading. On the four supporting columns hang wooden masks such as are worn when 'devil dances' are performed; but these actual masks, though representing named supernaturals, are not made for wearing, nor are dances performed in the monastery. Suspended from the cross-beams—for there is no ceiling and the reed thatch can be seen between the beams—are a number of sacred scroll pictures (*tang-ku*) but they have suffered so much from the weather that they are practically indecipherable.

To the west of the main room, above the *lha-gong* is a lumber room containing paper-presses and other paraphernalia not in constant use. The Lepchas make paper out of the pounded underbark

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

cardamum is planted, but every year at the flowering time a sacrifice is performed in honour of the supernatural Elaiji-*nyou*, whom the Lepchas equate with Maknyam *moong*, the devil of death. When they first planted cardamum they did no ceremonies, but they got ill; then a Lepcha from outside Zongu learned the proper ritual from a Nepali Jhankri (these priests are somewhat similar to the Mun) and taught it to the Lepchas of Zongu. The rather elaborate ritual has two surprising features; it is only permitted for male Mun to officiate, and the chickens, one of which is given by each household, are hung by their feet while still living during the ceremony and only afterwards killed by a small boy who hits them on the head. Both of these features are unusual in Lepcha ritual; only for the sacrifices to *Thyak-dum* and in the hunting ritual, and a couple of new exorcisms divined in the last ten years are women Mun excluded; and in no other sacrifice at all that I know of are the sacrificial animals ill-treated or made uncomfortable before they are killed. It was also from this foreign source that the Lepchas learned that the presence of menstruating women would blight the plant in flower; this is a completely alien idea, for otherwise menstruating women are paid no attention to. The Lepchas have modified this notion by saying that the plant dislikes any strong smell; soap or excreta would have just the same effect; they will not accept the prevalent Hindu idea of women being essentially unclean.

The main crops of dry rice, millet and buckwheat are grown in the temporary fields. These consist of clearings made in the forest, or rather secondary growth, for one year, and then allowed to lie fallow for seven years before being cultivated again. Nowadays all suitable land is divided up into private holdings, the landmarks consisting of big trees or streams or stones set up at irregular intervals. On the whole these clearings are not isolated; three or more households have all their portions next to one another and travel round together every year. Related households do not usually have adjacent grounds; when the land was originally distributed care was taken, it would seem, that nobody should be especially favoured; and since then the hazards of death and inheritance and split families have assigned the present neighbours.

The clearing of the land is started in the early spring; the women cut down the lower growths with their sickles, while the men climb and lop the bigger trees and saplings. Until recently the trees used to be cut down if possible, but now there is a Court

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

coming when they were invited, and begging them now to go away. On those occasions when singing is called for it is nearly always the Mun who sing, and they possess a considerable repertoire of more or less sacred songs. All these songs are in the minor key, more or less rhythmic, with a great stressing of the last syllable of each line, which is prolonged for several notes, usually in a descending scale. The tunes are not set, and allow of easy improvisation. Songs are often sung at feasts, and always at marriages; they are always unaccompanied. The bamboo flutes which some young men make and play are used entirely as a solitary diversion.

iv

The services of the Mun are continuously necessary in the life of every Lepcha. They must always be present at birth, at marriage they are the only essential priests, and at the death of laymen their rôle is of more emotional importance than the lamas. Throughout life they are necessary for cleansing from supernatural danger, for blessing and solemnising different undertakings, and, above all, for expelling devils.

Ceremonial cleansing is performed by *pék*-ing, by the Mun waving certain objects over the actual or potential sufferer. The objects waved differ with the circumstances; thus in the fifth month of pregnancy both parents are *pék* with a bunch of elephant grass to insure an easy delivery: if labour is difficult the mother in childbirth is *pék* with a live chicken, and, if she or her husband have neglected a pre-natal precaution, with the object which has been wrongly handled or finished. Similarly after an abortion or still-born child has been thrown into the river, a Mun will *pék* the carriers with a bunch of stinging and thorny plants and the parents will be *pék* with a live animal which will later be sacrificed, in order to prevent the devil which has caused one death causing more. *Pék*-ing is employed in a number of circumstances, sometimes alone, and sometimes as part of an exorcism. It is the nearest approach in Lepcha life to ritual cleansing.

Blessings are invoked and pacts solemnised by the ritual of *sakyou faat*, the pouring or drinking of strained *chi* from a cup on the sides of which dabs of butter have been placed. It is not absolutely essential that Mun perform this ritual; any old and experienced man who has received *loong* may do so. *Sakyou faat* cannot be offered by women, except by women Mun inside their own homes, by lamas, or by people in mourning. The ceremony is performed to solemnise a marriage, to set up the [illegible] relation, to mark the formal swearing of an oath or before starting any unusual undertaking.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

Milk may also be given to such orphans by the feeder taking it into his or her mouth and squirting it into the baby's. Two boys in Lingthem were artificially reared in this way. If the mother and child both die the child is placed in the mother's lap before the body is disposed of; similarly if the mother dies in the last months of pregnancy the foetus is ripped out and placed on her lap before burning or burial.

Children normally witness the birth of subsequent siblings and of other children born in the house. Except for one nervous adult, Jiroong, who said he was frightened when his younger sister was born, children do not seem to regard child-birth with any deep emotion. Twelve-year-old Ribu voiced the general sentiment when he said that during birth he was not frightened, though he was anxious for his mother. Children take birth in a very matter-of-fact way; 'first of all a woman becomes pregnant and then she puts out a child'. Only adopted children or only children who have not had occasion to witness child-birth surround the situation with any emotion or curiosity.[2]

ii

For the first three days of life the baby is considered to be still in the womb and all the pre-natal precautions have to be observed. It is not even referred to as a human child; it is called a rat-child. During those three days the mother must on no account touch the ground; were she to do so the blood clot would not descend. The father may go out but must not do heavy work such as lifting stones or cutting trees; such actions would cause the woman pain in her belly. Also nobody except those who live in the house must enter the house or see the child; should they do so the mother will have terrible pains. If the mother has recovered she can do ordinary household work. After the birth feast on the third day the mother may go outside as soon as she feels that she is strong enough to do so; no ceremony marks the first going out of a newly delivered mother, though for the first month she is fed on a special strengthening diet of chicken soup and extra strong *chi*.

On the third day the baby is officially born and a special birth feast is held for it. Before strangers enter the house the floors are scrubbed with wormwood plants, and incense burnt, and every member of the house washes his body, first in hot water indoors, and then in a stream, and also his clothes, to remove the uncleanness of birth.

[2] See Chapter Fifteen, p. 390.

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

grain are burnt with the corpse; a sort of long-handled shovel is used to make these offerings and they are thrown on to the pyre a little at a time, the officiating lama counting out loud and finishing up with a shout. The lama counts up to five ten times, up to seven five times and up to eight ten times. A pig, or very occasionally an ox, is killed at the house and this is put on to the pyre as food for the corpse after the corpse has been consumed. This animal is not usually consumed completely but merely cooked; the people who gathered the wood for the pyre are given this meat as their fee; if there is no meat they are given money. The relations of the dead man must stay by the pyre until the ashes are quite extinct.

All the unrelated people who have accompanied the family to the burning place are given a meal of rice, and a small gift of money —usually one or two annas—is given to a representative of each household present. Similar presents are also given to those who attend a burial if the mourners can afford it. On the way back from the disposal of a corpse a small bonfire is built for the mourners to jump over, and a knife or some other piece of iron is put in the doorway of the house for people to step over; both these precautions are taken to disinfect the mourners from the possible magical contagion of death.

Except that the corpse is not dressed and anointed in the house, but only when it is brought to the place designated for burial, the preliminaries for burial are exactly the same as those for burning. The corpse is carried in the basket to the burial place by one man, a near relation if possible; a husband must always carry his wife and a son his mother. As well as the friends and relations of the deceased a Mun accompanies the buriers. When the party arrive at the chosen site the corpse is placed on the ground and is washed and anointed with the mixture of butter, cloves, nutmeg and camphor, and wrapped in a new cloth which is arranged so as to cover the face. Then a circular grave about the height of a man is dug; a big stone is put at the bottom and the sides are lined with stones and four ropes are placed against the four corners. While these preparations are being made the surviving spouse or eldest son will stay by the corpse and talk to it saying: 'We are preparing this new house for you.' The body is put into the grave still sitting in the basket, orientated to face Kinchenjunga; then on the top of the grave and corpse is put a big flat stone and on the top of that four cooking stones supporting another flat stone. On the top of this is placed a little white stone which serves as an indication that the place is a

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

instead of turning eventually into a god it transformed itself into an emanation of Subdok Mung, and as such has been troubling the Mandal ever since. The local Mun and Lamas have held a consultation, as a result of which it has been decided that certain ceremonies are necessary; but these will not be efficacious unless carried out by a particular Mun who lives in Gyatong. The Mandal sent three times for this man, but he always refused to come; and it was only after being offered a substantial present of *chi* that he at last consented to attend. We were invited to witness the ceremony. When we arrived most of the family was collected in the kitchen, where the old Mun was seated with the usual offerings in front of him; there were several heaps of grain, lumps of butter, and one or two lighted lamps, the whole arranged on a cloth and placed on top of a winnowing-fan. By his side was a bowl of *chi*, out of which he dipped with a piece of banana leaf while making his incantations. He started by asking the demons to accept what he was giving them and finished by asking the gods in general to bless the Mandal, and implored them particularly to give him a son. The actual words he used were somewhat more Rabelaisian than my bald description suggests, and caused much laughter. After about a quarter of an hour the "specialist" handed over to the local Mun, when the offering was taken outside the house and placed on top of a fence. Nearby was a tethered ox, which was later killed with a bow and arrow by Gongyop's son. This beast was being offered to the Subdok Mung as a substitute for the Mandal's life. We always enjoyed attending these ceremonies; for apart from their inherent interest we were invariably offered a portion of the sacrifice, a most welcome addition to our otherwise unvaried diet of stringy chicken.

The Mandal's house is equalled only by that of Tafoor, and has a very fine and elaborate altar-room, complete with gilded images, and the twelve volumes of the *Boom*, the shortened version of the Kangyur. Although the Mandal is not himself a Lama it is usual for all who can afford to do so

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

756 he said that while there was no particular harm in other
787 people catching sight of his beads he must never discuss them, except with other Padim or Mun. If he did the god would be angry and refuse in future to help him: moreover, he was in the habit of using this particular rosary to determine the outcome of his love affairs. If he talked about it there was a chance that it might play him false! And so he begged to be excused. As he said this he tucked it away, well out of sight.

756 It is believed that when a Mun dies his soul returns to its
775 celestial home, where it changes into the god Hit, the guardian of which is Pong Rum, the patron of all hunters.
[764] The body is always buried and not treated in any special way. Even the soul like that of ordinary people needs direction after death, or it will not know which road to take. A Mun must be careful never to touch a corpse. If he did so his god would leave him for the time being, and he would be ill for at least two months. There is no harm in his looking upon a dead body; nor will anything ensue if he touches the bodies of
● [783] dead animals. Should he happen by mistake to touch a corpse he must get a Lama to cleanse his body with consecrated water, at the same time burning incense in the room while this is being done. After this he will regain his powers; but nothing, it may be noted, can cause the god permanently to desert the Mun.

757 In cases of illness in Lingtem a Lama is always called in first. He decides what treatment is necessary and then arranges accordingly. As a matter of fact, I cannot remember attending any ceremony, apart, of course, from purely religious festivals, at which a Lama and Mun were not both officiating; a regular Harley Street conspiracy!

756 In addition to Lamas and Muns, Lepchas also have recourse to people known as Nunjimu. This word does not appear in the dictionary: but the verb *Nun* (from which the word is presumably derived), which is Tibetan, is given as meaning "to be insensible, or cataleptic." These people are not nowadays often employed, and in Lingtem there was only one. According to Gongyop the original Nunjimus

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

751 The *Za-Sung* is a strip of paper wrapped round a piece of
777 bamboo and covered with a coating of lac, on which are impressed nine zeros representing eyes. This charm is usually worn on a string round the neck.

[415] The *Tshon-Sung*, or "weapon-warder," is always worn in a *Ka-Wo*, or metal charm box. This is usually of plain silver or copper, but is sometimes decorated with gold filigree work.
[523] In this box are usually kept the most precious relics and religious heirlooms of the family. These usually consist of such things as the hairs of some holy Lama, his bones, teeth, or a portion of his clothing. Nail-parings also are in much demand. These things are considered so efficacious in affording protection against weapons that Tibetans and Bhutanese are often willing to pay very high prices for them, and will not part with them for any consideration unless they believe that they are haunted or have become attended by some evil spirit which is likely to cause their owner sickness.

The *Palkyet-Sung*, or amulet of universal purpose, is considered to be particularly efficacious in averting the evil influences of physical mesmerism, disagreement between married couples, and in maintaining harmony between them.

823 Gold and platinum are believed to be proof against all
● 783 forms of pollution, but it is not often that such expensive materials can be afforded. Copper comes next in order of merit, and is preferred to silver as being less liable to pollution. Silver boxes must be sanctified by sprinkling holy water over them every morning and fumigating them with incense; but this is unnecessary with boxes of any other metal.

844 For cases of childbirth, and also for various diseases of the
751 nervous system, there are charms written on a thin strip of paper with Chinese ink. These are rolled into a pill, coated with butter, and given to the patient to swallow. In cases of difficult labour they are tied to the hair of the mother, on the crown of her head, in the belief that this expedites delivery of

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

342 361 777 behind the house; but for those born in "chicken" or "monkey" years a white cliff to the west of the site is good. If, by any chance, a person of "snake" or "horse" year finds that he has inherited a house with a reddish cliff behind he [783] need not refuse to occupy it. It will be perfectly all right if he gets a Lama to prepare nine pots of water, into each of which he must put, respectively, a few scrapings of gold, silver, turquoise, iron, and various other metals. These pots must be wrapped in red, blue, and yellow cloth, tied up with black thread, and built into a prayer-wall either by the owner of the house or someone specially deputed by him. It is considered bad to have water below the house which reflects the glare of the sun; but if this is unavoidable, then gold, silver, and copper must be thrown into the pool concerned. It is not good if water seeps up through the ground immediately below the site; but apparently of no consequence if this should happen above. Nor is it good if there is a cave between west and north, as this would undoubtedly house a *Mamu* devil. A house should never be built immediately opposite the entrance to a valley, nor opposite any sort of crack or cleft. This would be most unlucky and would cause a rift in the family occupying the house. Unless absolutely unavoidable, a site should not be selected that lies between two hills, since this would certainly cause the owner of the house to be attacked by special devils which would cause him to commit various offences against the Sikkim state!

[312] The quality of the land surrounding the site is of no importance; nor is the proximity of drinking water. It is nice to have friends and relations fairly near; but these are minor considerations and of no importance in the first instance. In a country which has some of the finest scenery in the world it appears odd to us that the view is never considered. Some houses have, indeed, an unparalleled view of the mountains; but when the sites were selected this was a matter that never even entered the builders' heads.

If a householder wishes to put up chortens or prayer-walls,

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

consideration instead of being looked upon as an outcast, and a source of defilement to others.

It is usual for everybody living in a house where a birth has recently taken place to wash themselves and their clothes, first in hot water inside the house, and afterwards in the nearest stream. The mother generally continues to wash every three days for the first month following the child's birth, and the baby itself is said to be washed each night and morning for a month. This, however, I think is merely a counsel of perfection and not often observed. I should add that there is amongst the Lepchas no idea of ceremonial uncleanliness, either at this or at any other time; nor have they the common obsession with defecation, which leads Indians to look upon the left hand (with which the body is always cleaned) as itself an unclean thing.

During the third-day celebrations the mother will usually wear new or at least freshly-washed clothes. The baby itself will be wrapped in a cloth, the colour of which should be in accordance with its birth-signs. Thus, if it has been ascertained that the child will become a Lama, for instance, it will be wrapped in a yellow cloth; if a hunter, then in red; if a woman of loose morals, lilac; and so on.

As soon as a woman becomes pregnant both she and her husband must take certain precautions, the neglect of which is thought to cause, amongst other things, difficult delivery. During the fifth month of pregnancy it is usual to call in a Mun, who will wave elephant grass over the mother and thus ensure an easy birth.

During the whole time of pregnancy and up to the third day after the birth of the child both the father and mother, should they be making garden fences, must work unassisted. Failure to observe this precaution will cause a difficult delivery.

The father must not take fish out of a trap, or the child will be born with its nose stopped up. Nor must he lock anything up, with the exception of his own private box, or the child will refuse to descend from the womb until such

4:Nebesky-Wojkowitz E-5 (1950-1951)1952
AK5 Lepcha AK5

by wild boars during the rainy season—was erected with the help of some twigs and dry leaves, the idea probably being, that this nest should provide a temporary shelter for the *Mŭk nyam* who according to the belief of some Lepcha clans, stays for seven days on the burial ground. When a woman died, a small hand-loom was sometimes placed near the tomb.

After closing the grave, an egg was broken on the tombstone and some rice as well as a bamboo container filled with Lepcha beer (*ci*) were placed on the hillock as a food-offering for the dead. Then all tools which were used for digging the pit were beaten against each other for a while and at last all the wooden handles of these instruments were removed and piled up near the grave, while only the iron parts were kept to be used again.

When returning from the funeral, the mourners had to put up obstacles—as already mentioned before—to hinder the demon *Mă zóm mung* from following them. When reaching the house, everybody who had attended the funeral had to undergo a ritual purification. To this purpose an ox was killed and some of its blood was poured into a vessel and strained with water; the right foreleg of the sacrificed animal was laid aside, to be used in the ceremony which commenced after darkness had fallen, while the rest was prepared as food for the guests. Then a *Bong thing* or *Mŭn* entered the house, in which the death had occurred and performed its cleansing, going into every room and sprinkling in all corners some of the ox blood, with the help of a whisk made of nine different kinds of grass. Then all foodstuff which had lain close to the dead, had to be removed and at last everybody before entering the house had to be purified by waving the grass whisk over his head; this action was known as *Phĭk* or *A phĭk*.

During the night the ceremony of "recalling the *Mŭk nyam*" had to be performed and in some of the more outlying localities this rite is sometimes still practised. Only a *Mŭn* can perform this rite. In former times, before starting her invocations, the *Mŭn* had to walk in the evening to the grave and beat several times with a stick against the tombstone. Returning to the house, she took her seat with the back to a wall and facing the door; it was regarded as auspicious, if she could face in this position Mt. Kanchenjunga.

Then the right foreleg of the ox, which had been prepared previously, was placed in a basket and brought into the room. Only the upper part of the leg was used, while the part from the knee downward was cut away. The basket was set near the *Mŭn* and a rope wound around the joint of the leg, while the other end was fastened with a